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SUBJECT: BURMA: VISIT OF DPRK VICE FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: CDA Tom Vajda for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

Summary

¶1. (C) North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Yong-il reportedly met with the SPDC's number four official, Lt. General Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, Foreign Minister Nyan Win, and others during his November 6-10 visit to Burma, signing an agreement on visas and discussing trade, economic, and technology cooperation. Details are lacking, but the visit -- coming on the heels of Nyan Win's trip to Pyongyang in late October -- is consistent with ongoing and senior-level exchanges between the two countries and raises further questions about the scope of cooperation between the two pariah states. End summary.

Warm Reception

¶2. (C) DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Kim Yong-il was given a warm reception during his November 6-10 visit to Burma. In addition to signing an agreement with the GOB on visa exemptions for diplomatic and official personnel, Kim reportedly met with SPDC Secretary I Lt. General Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, as well as Foreign Minister Nyan Win and Rangoon mayor Aung Thein Lynn. The mayor was formerly the Deputy Minister of Industry 2, which has responsibility for heavy industries. Kim also held the third round of bilateral consultations with Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister Kyaw Thu. The ROK DCM reports that these consultations were formalized via an MOU signed between Kyaw Thu and Kim during the former's trip to Pyongyang in 2007. Our Embassy officials also observed an elaborate cultural/entertainment program organized for Kim by the Burmese military in Mandalay. As far as we can tell, this was Kim Yong-il's second visit to Burma; the first was to mark the April 2007 re-establishment of bilateral relations.

¶3. (C) The Australian Ambassador has told us she raised Kim's visit in a recent meeting with Kyaw Thu; the Deputy Foreign Minister stated that the two sides discussed trade, economic, and technology cooperation -- the same line used to describe the meeting in the government mouthpiece New Light of Myanmar. Pressed for further information on the scope of technology cooperation, Kyaw Thu said the two sides discussed general issues like on-shore mining but offered no further details. According to the Australian Ambassador, the DFM denied any nuclear or conventional weapons cooperation, saying that Burma could "easily get what it needs from China." The Ambassador told us she also raised the issue of DPRK-Burma cooperation with her North Korean counterpart; the response was vague except on one point: the DPRK Ambassador stressed (with a straight face) that except for Embassy officials, there is "not one single North Korean" in Burma.

¶4. (C) In a separate conversation, the ROK DCM told us that his MOFA career diplomatic contacts report an aggressive campaign by the DPRK to improve relations with Burma, including a push for a bilateral MOU on economic and

technical cooperation. The ROK DCM's contact indicated that proposal was under GOB review. North Korea has also increased its invitations for high-level Burmese visits to the DPRK, such as the trip to Pyongyang by Burmese FM Nyan Win in late October. The ROK DCM expressed concern -- though not surprise -- that the GOB was clearly favoring North Korea over the ROK. He noted, for example, that DPRK events, such as the celebration of Kim Jong-il's birthday, have been attended by SPDC members and the Foreign Minister, and that the North Korean Ambassador is able to meet with Secretary I and actively cultivate contact with Rangoon Mayor Aung Thein Lynn. The ROK has no such access.

Potential Impact on ROK Resettlement of DPRK Refugees

¶5. (C) The ROK DCM cited concerns that Burma's tilt toward North Korea could result in a decrease in GOB cooperation with his Embassy in facilitating the transfer of North Korean refugees from Burma to South Korea. The DCM reported that about 50 DPRK refugees a year show up at the ROK Embassy in Rangoon, having traveled over land from China. To date GOB immigration authorities have allowed the refugees to board flights for South Korea bearing provisional ROK passports. The cooperation has been on an ad hoc basis, which means it could quickly be reversed. The South Korean DCM noted that on two occasions North Korean refugees have been arrested and imprisoned on charges of illegally entering the country. In the first case the GOB eventually turned the refugee over to

ROK officials for onward transit to South Korea. In the more recent case, however, the refugee remains in prison and GOB officials have so far refused to cooperate with the ROK Embassy, insisting that they first need approval from the North Koreans to release the individual.

Comment

¶6. (S) The activities and scope of the DPRK's activities in Burma remain a serious concern but also extremely difficult to track. Our access to GOB officials is limited, but they're not talking in any event. The North Koreans appear to have good access to leading Burmese officials, both at public events, which is how the regime signals its favorites, and privately. Evidence indicates ongoing and potentially increasing conventional arms sales -- the ROK Embassy confirmed sales of artillery, but not of missile systems -- and the presence of North Koreans at different facilities around the country. Further details, including regarding the top concern, possible nuclear cooperation, remain elusive.

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End Cable Text